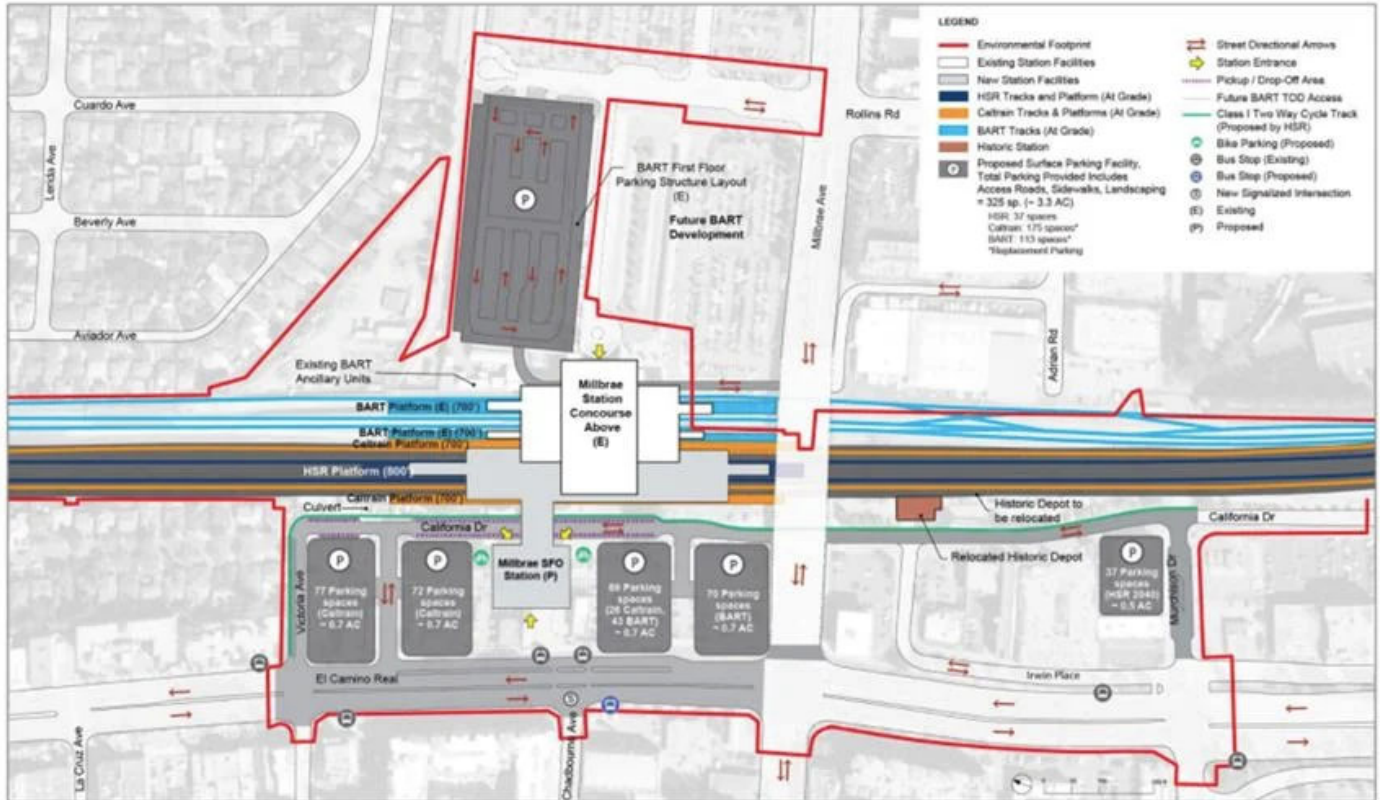


https://www.sfexaminer.com/news/millbrae-sues-high-speed-rail-authority-over-proposed-station/article_e0c8643a-078a-11ed-a739-5f7575116d72.html

Millbrae sues High-Speed Rail Authority over proposed station

by Benjamin Schneider | Examiner staff writer
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A map of High-Speed Rail's proposed Millbrae Station design, with a station entrance and parking lots where the Serra Station development is slated to be constructed.

California High Speed Rail Authority

For California's high-speed rail project, it's two steps forward and one step back.

The California High-Speed Rail (CAHSR) Authority recently celebrated the allocation of the final \$4.2 billion from the 2008 voter-approved bond that launched the project, ending years of legislative brinkmanship and paving the way for the completion of the Central Valley section of the line. The rail authority also recently released the final environmental impact report for the San Francisco to San Jose section, setting the stage for full environmental clearance between San Francisco and Los Angeles County next month.

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But, as the Examiner previously reported, some Peninsula cities aren't happy with CAHSR's plans. And now, one of them has taken their concerns to court.

On July 1, Millbrae filed suit against CAHSR, as well as Caltrain and BART, in San Mateo County Superior Court over a small plot of land next to the existing Millbrae BART and Caltrain station. The city is petitioning the court to allow it to acquire the approximately 11,000 square foot parcel via eminent domain in order to extend California Drive and make space for Serra Station, an approved mixed-use development with 488 housing units and office space.

The land in question is currently owned jointly by Caltrain and BART, which have agreed to grant an easement to CAHSR to add a high-speed rail stop to the existing station complex.

In its lawsuit, Millbrae says that the extension of California Drive on to the parcel in question has been planned since 1998, when the city approved a new zoning plan for the station area. The suit also highlights the benefits of building housing next to the station, calling the development "a more necessary use than either a vacant lot or the future speculative and unfunded relocation of Caltrain rail tracks and construction of High Speed Rail tracks."

The suit repeatedly refers to High-Speed Rail as a "speculative" project, since the funding and timeline for construction of the San Francisco to San Jose section remain unclear. The latest cost estimate for the full system, stretching from Anaheim to San Francisco, is \$105 billion, of which only about \$20 billion has been secured.

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CAHSR's planned station design for Millbrae includes new tracks and platforms for high-speed trains, an expanded concourse level above the tracks, and additional parking lots. Earlier in the environmental review process, CAHSR proposed a compromise design that would have affected a smaller portion of the Serra Station development. Millbrae rejected that compromise and CAHSR reverted to its original station design, which it describes as "operationally superior," in the final environmental document. Millbrae officials have previously asked for the station to be put underground, but CAHSR has rejected that idea as being prohibitively expensive.

CAHSR's proposed Millbrae Station design would include a station entrance and several parking lots on the land where Serra Station is slated to be developed, though the parcel related to the lawsuit would be used for additional tracks and train platforms. A spokesperson for CAHSR declined to comment on pending litigation.

Boris Lipkin, Northern California Regional Director for CAHSR, previously told the Examiner that when Millbrae fully approved the Serra Station development in 2018, the city was aware of High-Speed Rail's proposed station design.

But Millbrae makes the opposite claim. "Previously both Caltrain and High-Speed Rail managers had no objections to this plan," Justine Bleeker, Millbrae's public information officer, wrote in an email. "CHSR has alternatives, but as they have demonstrated up and down the State, they have again chosen the worst possible path by not pursuing viable options presented to them by the City of Millbrae and private property owners. Instead, CHSR continues to force their only plan, which is to block housing and build an 8-acre asphalt surface parking lot."

The Serra Station development is being led by Vincent Muzzi, owner of the Magnolia of Millbrae senior residence home, and an alternate member of the San Mateo County Assessment Board. In the 1990s, he served as a member of the San Mateo County Planning Commission.

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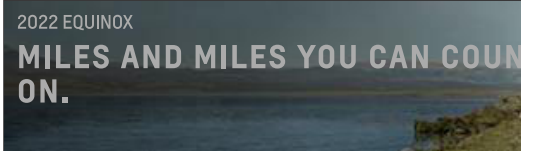
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